

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-05

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R 261854Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8444

SECDEF

INFO USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USNMR SHAPE

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 01287

DEFENSE FOR ISA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL, MCAP, NATO, UK

SUBJECT: MASON ATTACKS THATCHER ON THATCHER'S SPEECH ON  
FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY

REF: A) LONDON 956; B) LONDON 1158

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SUMMARY: ROY MASON, SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, ATTACKED CON-

SERVATIVE LEADER MARGARET THATCHER YESTERDAY (JANUARY 25) IN RESPONSE TO HER STRONGLY ANTI-SOVIET JANUARY 19 SPEECH. REFTEL A. BRANDING MRS. THATCHER AS "MAGGIE THE COLD WAR WARRIOR," MASON IN A STINGING ATTACK THROUGH A STATEMENT TO THE PRESS ASSOCIATION DERIDED HER WARNING ABOUT THE MENACE OF THE SOVIET MILITARY BUILD-UP AS "SCREECHING FROM HER PANTPY DOOR,HARKING BACK TO THE DAYS OF BRITAIN'S IMPERIALIST GRANDEUR AS IF BRITAIN ALONE CAN TURN SOVIET AOMMUNISM BACK TO ITS OWN SHORES." MASON SAID THAT "NATO, THE US AND WESTERN EUROPE KNOW FULL WELL THE SOVIET MILITARY EXPENDITURE AND ITS GROWTH." ALL NEWSPAPERS GIVE THE STORY PROMINENT PLAY. END SUMMARY

1. MASON'S ATTACK ON THATCHER FOLLOWED A FULL WEEK OF CRITICISM FROM SOVIET DIPLOMATS AND THE SOVIET PRESS (REF-TEL B) WHICH DUBBED THATCHER AS THE "IRON LADY OF BRITISH POLITICS"--FOR HER SPEECH WARNING THAT RUSSIA IS BENT ON WORLD DOMINANAE. MASON CONDEMNED THE THATCHER SPEECH AS "ILL-TIMED AND PROVOCATIVE" AND AS A "REPETITION OF OLD-FASHIONED REACTIONARY TORY DOGMA" WHICH. IF HEEDED COULD JEOPARDIZE PEACE AND "BRING BACK THE AWFUL SPECTER OF NUCLEAR WAR." MASON NOTED THAT HER SPEECH CAME AT A TIME WHEN MBFP NEGOTIATIONS WERE AT "A CRITICAL PHASE WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF TACTICAL AND THEATER NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND CONVENTIONAL TANK ARMIES BEING REDUCED." MASON CONTINUED BY POINTING OUT THAT BRITAIN IS "A MEMBER OF AN ALLIANCE AND MRS. THATCHER OUGHT TO BE REMINDED THAT SINCE NATO WAS BORN WE HAVE HAD A FULL GENERATION OF PEACE AND WESTERN EUROPE HAS HAD ITS LONGEST SPELL OF PEACE FOR THE PAST 200 YEARS."

2. MASON SAID THAT "COLD WARS HAVE COME AND GONE--BEEN AND MELTED. AND NOW WE ARE ANXIOUS TO ENTER AN ERA OF DETENTE. PATIENCE, DILIGENCE AND NEGOTIATION ARMED WITH SUFFICIENT SECURITY TO TALK FROM STRENGTH, IS THE ORDER OF THE DAY." HE CONTINUED BY NOTING "GREAT ENDEAVORS ARE UNDERWAY TO LESSEN THE TENSION BETWEEN THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL MILITARY ALLIANCES. WE AND OUR ALLIES HAVE THE POWER, THE MIGHT, THE SOLIDARITY AND THE WILL TO DETER. WE DO NOT HAVE TO PROVOKE. THE THATCHER THESIS IS ILL-CONFIDENTIAL

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TIMED AND PROVOCATIVE..."

3. COMMENT: IT IS OBVIOUS THAT THE CONSERVATIVES ARE DELIGHTED BY LOT ONLY THE STRONG SOVIET REACTION TO THE THATCHER SPEEAH BUT ALSO BY THE LABOR PARTY'S REACTION--BETWEEN THE TUO FAR GREATER PUBLICITY AND ATTENTION TO HER SPEECH HAQ BEEN GENERATED THAN ORIGINALLY ANTICIPATED. CERTAINLY MASON'S ARGUMENTS IN HIS BARNSELY STATEMENT--

WHICH THE GUARDIAN'S PARLIAMENTARY CORRESPONDENT, SIMON HOGGART, DESCRIBED AS A "GRAPHIC AND VITUPERATIVE STATEMENT" IN WHICH MASON POURED "A GENEROUS COATING OF BILE" OVER THE THATCHER SPEECH--ARE NOT LIKELY TO DETER CONSERVATIVES FROM CONTINUING THEIR ATTACK ON LABOR PARTY CUTBACKS IN DEFENSE SPENDING. ON THE CONTRARY, THATCHER HAS SET IN MOTION A BANDWAGON AND MANY CONSERVATIVE MPS CAN BE EXPECTED TO JUMP ON AND KEEP IT ROLLING. JUST AS MASON NOTED TM AMBASSADOR RICHARDSON DURING THE AMBASSADOR'S FAREWELL CALL THAT CALLAGHAN AND HE EXPECTED "A HOWL FROM THE LEFT" BECAUSE THE DEFENSE CUTS WOULD BE

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LESS THAN WHAT THE LEFT IS DEMANDING SO NOW MASON MUST FACE A HOWL FROM THE RIGHT FOR CUTTING DEFENSE TOO DEEPLY. THE TIME HAS COME FOR THE DEBATE TO BE JOINED. WE CAN EXPECT MASON AND CALLAGHAN "WILL GO PUBLIC" WITH THEIR CASE. MASON'S STATEMENT UNDOUBTEDLY IS THE OPENING BLAST. WHILE NO OBJECTIVE OBSERVER HERE COULD ACCUSE MASON AND CALLAGHAN (OR THE PRIME MINISTER) OF BEING CONFIDENTIAL

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COMPLACENT ABOUT THE SOVIET THREAT, PARTY POLITICAL LINES ARE BEING CLEARLY DRAWN. IAN GILMOUR, NEWLY APPOINTED CONSERVATIVE DEFENSE SPOKESMAN, WHO HAS MADE SEVERAL STATEMENTS ON THE SUBJECT OVER THE WEEKEND, SAID FOR EXAMPLE, "MR. MASON IS NOT VERY CAREFUL ABOUT THE COMPANY HE KEEPS. ONE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED HIM TO LEAVE A DECENT INTERVAL BEFORE JOINING THE RUSSIANS IN HEAPING ABUSE ON MRS. THATCHER. HIS STATEMENT REEKS OF COMPLACENCY. MR. MASON HAS TO PRETEND THAT ALL IS WELL ON THE DEFENSE FRONT. HOW OTHERWISE CAN HE JUSTIFY HAVING PRESIDED OVER THREE CUTS IN DEFENSE EXPENDITURES IN LESS THAN TWO YEARS? MR. MASON MAY BE HAPPY ABOUT WHAT HE IS DOING. BUT NOBODY ELSE IS. THE SERVICES ARE UNHAPPY, AND SO ARE OUR ALLIES." REGINALD MAUDLING (CONSERVATIVE SPOKESMAN ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS) SAID ONLY ONE WORD IN REPLY TO MASON: "POPPYCOCK."

4. IT IS ALMOST CERTAIN NOW THAT DEFENSE ISSUES IN THEIR BROADEST SENSE AND DEFENSE SPENDING PER SE ARE MATTERS BEING PUSHED TO THE FOREFRONT OF POLITICAL DEBATE. A VERY REAL CHANCE EXISTS THAT THE DEBATE ON THE LEVEL OF DEFENSE SPENDING COULD TURN INTO A MAJOR POLICY ISSUE. FOR YEARS "DEFENSE" AS AN ISSUE HAS BEEN RELEGATED TO A RELATIVELY QUIESCENT PLACE IN PUBLIC DEBATE BY BOTH CONSERVATIVES AS WELL AS LABORITES. THE THATCHER SPEECH, THE EXTRAORDINARY SOVIET REACTION TO IT, THE OPPOSITION'S "TASTE OF BLOOD" IN THIS ISSUE--TOGETHER WITH MASON'S OWN EFFORTS TO MARSHAL MODERATE LABOR FORCES AGAINST THE TREASURY/HEALEY THREAT--MAY ALL CONVERGE AND FORCE DEFENSE TO BECOME A MAJOR FOCAL POINT OF PARTISAN DEBATE AGAIN. WE BELIEVE WE ARE NOW SEEING THE EARLY SIGNS THAT A FIGHT IS BEING MOUNTED. IT APPEARS THE OPPOSITION INTENDS TO KEEP THE PRESSURE UP; HOWEVER, THE REAL TEST IS WHETHER THE BRITISH PUBLIC CARES ENOUGH ABOUT DEFENSE MATTERS TO SUPPORT STRONGLY ENOUGH THOSE WHO CHAMPION

ITS CAUSE AND PRIORITY. WE REMAIN SKEPTICAL THAT THE  
PRIORITIER IN PUBLIC EXPENDITURE WILL BE CHANGED SIGNI-  
FICANTLY UNTIL BRITAIN'S ECONOMIC SITUATION IS IMPROVED.  
THUS, AS AN EDITORIAL IN THE TIMES PUT IT LAST WEEK,  
"THE TEMPTATION TO REGARD DEFENSE AS A SACRIFICIAL LAMB  
WHICH CAN BE SLAUGHTERED OR AT LEAST HACKED ABOUT WITH-  
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OUT TOO MUCH EMBARRASSING FUSS, HAS PROVED IRRESISTIBLE  
TO SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS--CONSERVATIVE AS WELL AS  
LABOR" IS LIKELY TO REMAIN AN ALL TOO APT OBSERVATION.

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